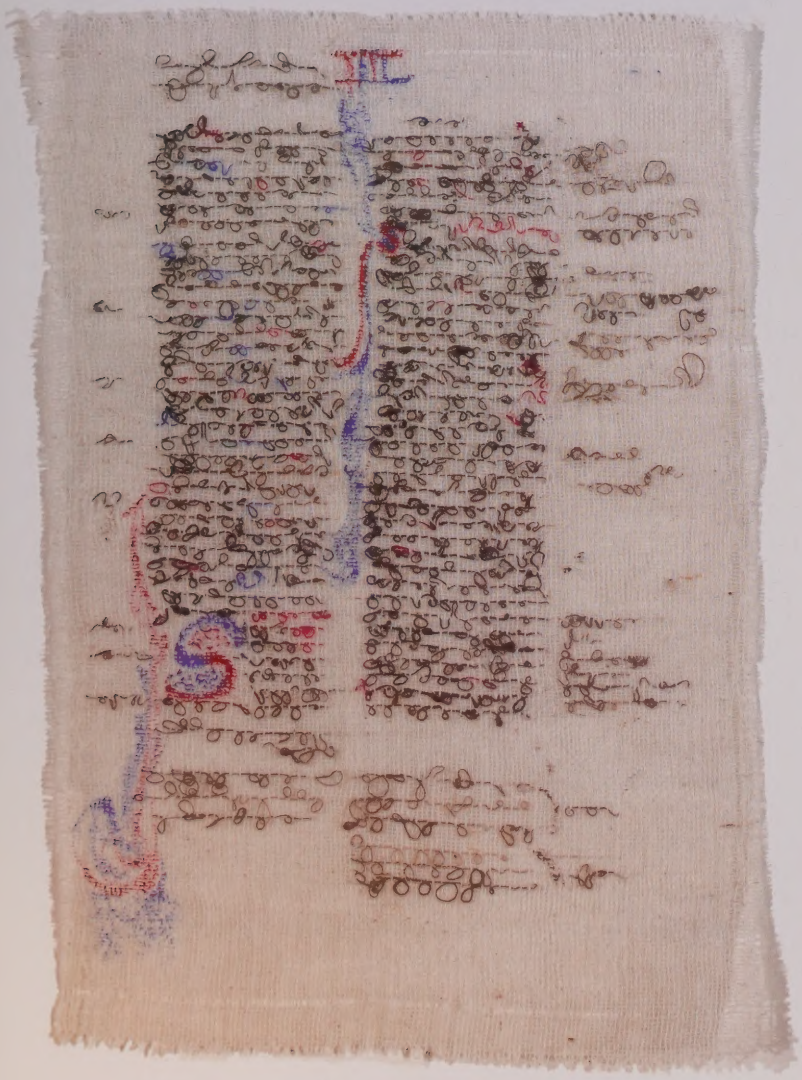
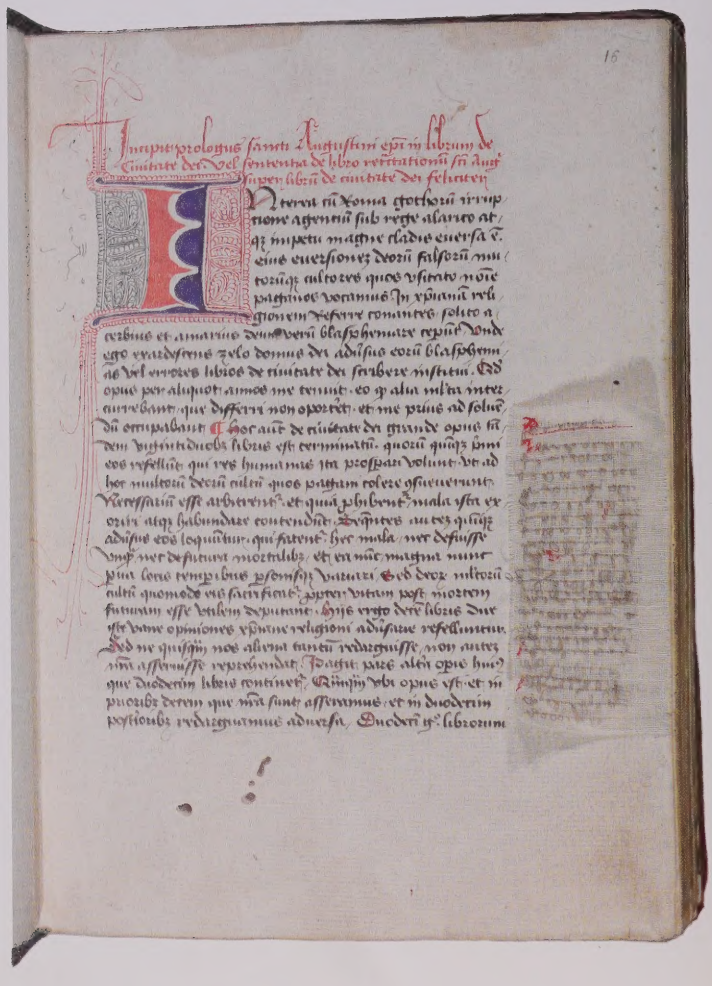
## Commentary: an exhibition of work by

# sylvia ptak

On display at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library

25 May to 3 September 2004





*Intervention: Augustine. De Civitate Dei, Book 1-13, fifteenth century*

*Cover:*

*Commentary: Peter Lombard. Sententiarum Libri IV, late thirteenth century*

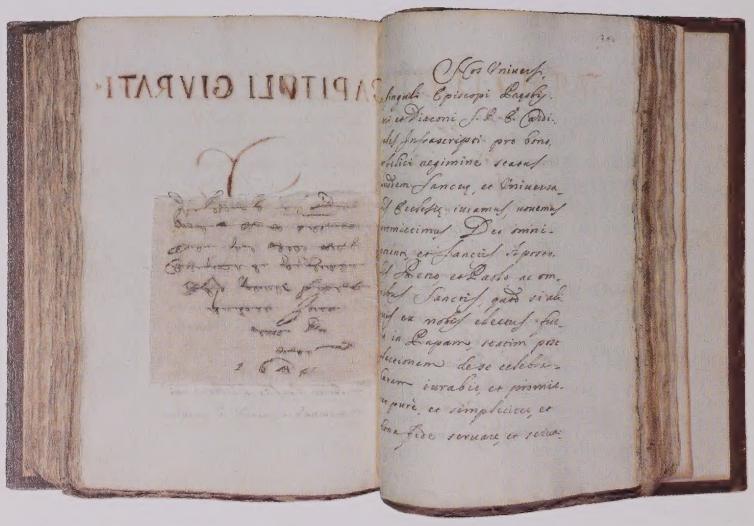


RB267824

When Emrys Evans, the now-retired Fisher conservator, and I first visited Sylvia Ptak at her studio during the winter of 2001 to explore the possibility of this exhibition we were both struck by Sylvia's passion for books and documents of every description. She showed us a variety of her finished pieces, which all played with the theme of 'what is a text' and challenged the viewer to make sense of works that closely resemble text, but are essentially illegible. Emrys and I were accustomed to working with scholars and researchers who made use of the documents in the Fisher collection for their significant content, or their artifactual or documentary properties. Sylvia was clearly inspired by the early books and manuscripts in our collection, but was responding to them on an altogether different plane, transmuting their essence into works of art; a different sort of *Commentary* on the collection.

Since that visit, Sylvia has spent many, many hours poring over a great variety of books and manuscripts in the Fisher collection, looking for particular visual elements which function as themes in this exhibition. Sylvia and Kyo Maclear, in their essays in this catalogue, explore the works in the exhibition from a variety of viewpoints, while at the same time placing the pieces within the overall context of the Fisher Library. Stan Bevington was excited by the possibilities of this project from the beginning and we are delighted to be co-publishing this catalogue with Coach House.

Although this exhibition is a departure from our customary approach to books and texts, Sylvia's work does have ties to other parts of the collection. Her visual representations of text have something in common, for instance, with the concrete poetry movement. An interest in the extended aspects of language has been expressed by poets such as bpNichol, who wrote of the page as a 'visual field' and noted that 'to write is a visual act'. From early in the twentieth century *avant-garde* visual artists have experimented with using text in their art[1]. Sylvia's workis represented in 'Metalogos', a travelling group exhibition of language artists to be shown



*Intervention: Capitoli Givrati, 1644 from Carte varie M.S.*

in two locations in Italy this year. The term 'intermedia' or bpNichol's 'borderblur' both capture the interdisciplinarity of these attempts to meld together language and image in ways which provoke us to re-examine our own responses. Sylvia's work inhabits this exciting juncture of the literary and visual arts, and explores the richness and beauty of the Fisher collection in a fresh, provocative and very appealing way.

Anne Dondertman, Assistant Director
Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library

1. I am indebted to Gil McElroy's essay 'Ground states' in the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum's bpNichol exhibition catalogue for insights into the connections between the visual and literary arts (St. Art: The Visual Poetry of bpNichol. Charlottetown, 2000).

**Reading Material: Sylvia Ptak**
**by Kyo Maclear**

Venture into the dimly lit atrium of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. The atmosphere is hushed and reverential. Books flow from floor to ceiling – ancient tomes with leather bindings; pre-Gutenberg manuscripts of papyrus, vellum, parchment and bark; volumes written by hand, which speak of human imperfection through a language of blots, cross-outs, smears and smudges.

In this secular temple, books are a source of information beyond their literary content. Books in unknown languages reveal their meanings through the wear on their bindings, stains and marginalia on their pages. The 'patina' gained through centuries of reading and contact is an irreplaceable surface. What comes to the fore is the relationship of people to their books, and the way the physical object is transformed through centuries of handling – the manner in which every reader contributes to a book's history simply by touching it.

Sylvia Ptak's *Commentary* has a quietness and restraint that is apropos to this setting. Ptak's artworks are composed of abstracted texts worked into cotton gauze. Pigment-stained threads have been pulled out of the woven fabric to create word-like shapes. Carefully plucked lines, configured into paragraphs and columns, recall the elaborate handwriting found in the manuscripts. Errors are crossed out, some lines are highlighted in red. One page resembles Hebrew. Another looks convincingly like English, or maybe French – it's all vaguely familiar – but closer investigation reveals that the words are unintelligible. They don't cohere.

*Commentary* is, in fact, many things that it does not, on first glance, appear to be. Despite its textual character, it is unreadable. The more one looks, the more one sinks into the work's silent visual chaos. Word-like fragments slip and slide across one's field of vision, seeping into one's consciousness like whispered thoughts or spectral messages. There is a powerful oscillation between surface and depth, knowingness and symbolic mystery, the fixed and the ethereal.

**The Word**

The documents to which Ptak's 'pages' or gauze texts refer are solid, authoritative, proscriptive, ancient. Ranging from a 'Babylonian Talmud, sixth century' to a 'Certificate of Married Woman's Deed, nineteenth century' to the 'Four Gospels in Greek, ca.1100', the originals contain the word of G-d or the Law. The mere physical presence of such texts has provided communities throughout history with a sense of security and foundation – a reminder of what they have learned as well as that which they strive to know.

Yet in Ptak's gauzy simulations, the original texts – once solid and sturdy and sure – have become slight and airy. Divested of weight and fixity, the feeling of certainty they once carried feels illusory. The cloth 'pages' hanging in the atrium vitrine are now evocations, wavering in the air like dreams that evaporate as we awake.

In a pointed intervention, Ptak has also laid cloth inserts directly in books belonging to the library collection. Again one encounters the appearance of language, a kind of simulacra in which the content keeps on slipping away. But this time there is a show-through element, a palimpsest feeling, a level of interaction, which like marginalia or commentary evokes a call and response between the real text and the simulated text. Here, you will find Thomas Aquinas' 'Scripta ad Hanibaldum Episcopum' or Galileo's thoughts on mechanics and tides – recorded on smooth white pages and accompanied by lyrical drawings – but also a whisper of something else. In the same way that old books not only reveal their authors, but in the form of marginalia, their nameless readers, Ptak's 'Interventions' convey a lost and inaccessible social commentary.

The most riveting aspect of all this work – whether free-floating or overlaid directly on the source document – is its sheer physicality. Ptak makes writing palpable. She writes with a pin not with a pen. She picks away at the cloth, inverting the weaver's task, pulling, twisting and inking threads as she works. A visual pleasure resides in the way the threads declare themselves – the way they meander, loop, spiral, and squiggle. The 'words' literally grow out of and engage with the fabric. They are not imposed on it through surface embroidery. Just as scientists continue to unravel the strands of DNA, of which our human genome is constructed, Ptak claims that by pulling the threads she 'releases the vocabulary embedded in the material.'

The overall effect is exquisite. There's a kind of eloquent beauty to each improvisation; a thin, spindly, scratchy quality which leads to loopier rhythms and deceptively flurried scrawls (deceptive, because they are actually fussed over with a meticulous hand). Ptak produces a fragile – if stylish – graffiti. A cryptic and delicate network of automatic and intuitive gestures. As with the scribbles of Cy Twombly, Ptak's work goes straight to your heart without passing your brain.

In doing so, the physicality of her *Commentary* attunes us to different registers of intelligence. To say that we read books (the artist seems to suggest), may not fully account for the many other ways they communicate their meanings, the ways a book may move us viscerally rather than verbally.

## The Medium

'Text' and 'textile' both derive from the Latin verb 'texere' meaning 'to construct or to weave'. Metaphors relating the two are commonplace – we spin a yarn, weave a story, follow the thread of narrative and fabricate or even embroider a tale. Our thoughts may be 'seamless' or they can 'unravel,' 'tangle,' or 'fray.' Sometimes our ideas have too many 'loose ends.' [1]

Textiles themselves are rich, illuminating texts. But Ptak's cloth pages work against the grain of tradition – the elaborate story-telling cloths of ancient Greece, the woven Koranic texts of Islam, or the embroidered samplers of more recent western culture, which taught generations of little girls everything from the alphabet to precepts and biblical texts. Ptak subverts pedagogical customs.[2] Instead, she uses fabric to create seditious, undomesticated texts, which refuse to enter into conventional, narrative language.

A spirit of provocation is sown throughout Ptak's creative process. She is an analogue artist in a digital world. She draws us to the vestigial art of cursive writing at a time when keyboards are rapidly replacing penmanship. To see her hard at work, crouched at her drafting table, is to conjure up the silhouette of the Medieval scribe and the monks of the Middle Ages, whose piety was expressed through a near obsessive devotion to the written word.[3] Yet, on the deepest level, she remains an upsetter of the word; an interloper who approaches her deconstructions with the intensity and analytical fervor of a talmudic scholar.

## The Message

Journey into the Maclean Hunter Room on the lower level of the Thomas Fisher Library and you will encounter the miscellanea of Ptak's working process – book works, and epistolary ephemera, old fashioned blotter rollers, second-hand school-books. Odd things. A sampling of her vast collection. None of this ephemera tells us why Ptak does what she does, but it may give us a sense of her ecology and her passion. (As Walter

*1. Weaving the Word by Kathryn Sullivan Kruger explores the connection between written texts and woven textiles. Kruger claims that prior to the advent of written texts, cloth was one of the primary modes for transmitting social beliefs and messages.*

*2. Originally a textile artist, Ptak went 'back to the cloth' in 1998, with an exhibition entitled 'Dissembling Language,' at Mercer Union, Toronto.*

*3. Note the overlapping etymology of scribe and scribble, which both derive from the Latin 'scribere' meaning 'to write'. Paradoxically, to say something is a scribble in our logocentric culture is to immediately demote it, to reduce it to the proto-language of children's scrawls, doodles, and dabs. Yet, anyone who has spent time with preverbal children knows that it is precisely through their scrawls and scribbles, that they reveal a deep-seated human need 'to make a story.'*

Benjamin once wrote, 'Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories.')[4]

More than the sum of its parts, Sylvia Ptak's *Commentary* is a meditation and a provocation. It is an intricate flux of writing that continually snags against its own surface. It is an invitation to the forgotten ghosts of history, the margin writers, the silenced or unknown commentators, to come forth and shake things up. It is a challenge to viewers to question our desire for coherence and solid meaning.

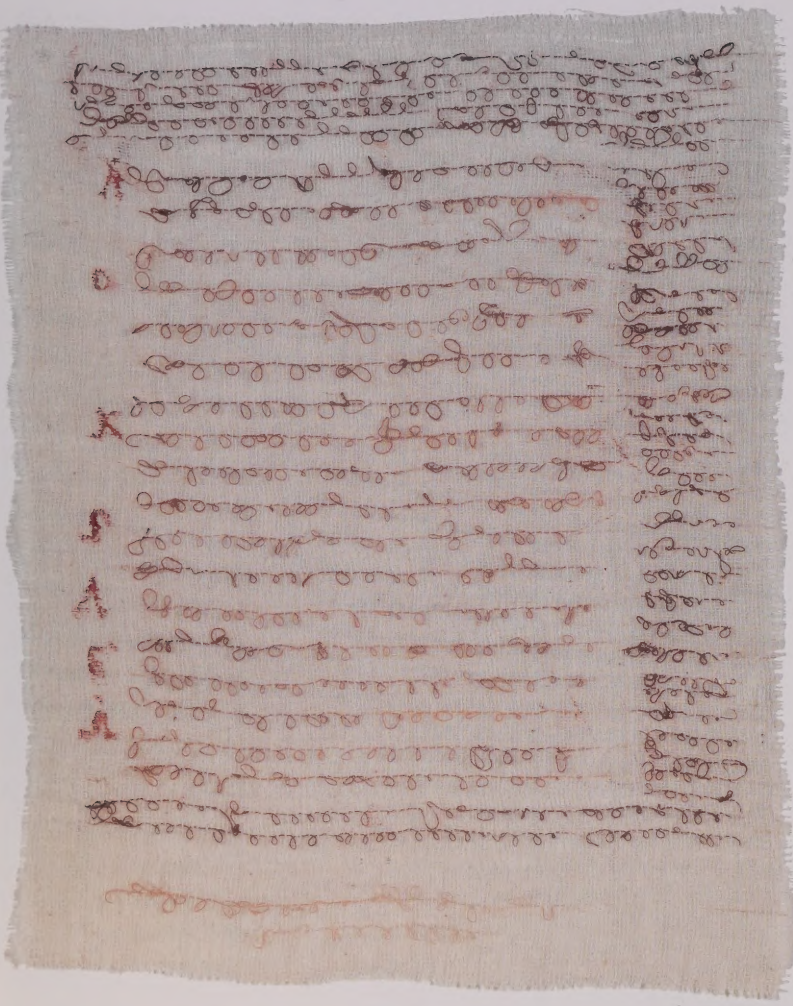
For despite the appearance of familiar details – a set margin, an illuminated letter 'P' – Ptak has created the graphic equivalent of speaking in tongues. Some may see Sanskrit or the runes of some ancient language. But the bottom line is that we are all foreigners to this language. It *others* us, in the same way that some of us may be decentred by the Thai writing on a Bangkok train platform, the Arabic in a Beirut restaurant menu, or the Vietnamese in the *Hanoi Daily News*.

As a writer who relies on words as her medium, I find this forfeiture of meaning, this liberation from the shackles of literalism, to be both exhilarating and terrifying. It represents a kind of ontological vertigo. The overt inadequacies of her 'words' act out the inadequacies of reading, translating and communicating. What does it mean for the message to be impenetrable? What is the self without language?

It is not just that Ptak creates foreign and unreadable texts. It is that she takes us to the cusp of illegibility. She takes us to the point that language dissolves. Her work poises the viewer on the knife edge between symbolism and randomness. And this is both wonderful and threatening. For ultimately it is in the image of an unfathomable text that we are forced to reckon with the world as it really is – errant, unpredictable, nonsensical – despite all our social and scientific efforts to contain, catalogue and collect it.

Kyo Maclear is a Toronto arts writer. Her criticism has been published in such magazines as *Mix, Saturday Night, Canadian Art, Toronto Life*, and *Fuse*. She is also the author of *Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

*4. Entering Sylvia Ptak's studio for the first time in late January, I was astounded by the sheer abundance of objects in view. Choosing my footsteps carefully amongst collected maps, I found my eyes roaming across a visual maze of artifacts from empty ink vials and pen nibs to player piano rolls and postcards. Dental floss, early 20th century student journals, spools of typewriter corrector tape, insect pins – all of it seemed profoundly beautiful in Ptak's hands.*



*Commentary: Bible. The Four Gospels in Greek [Codex Torontonensis], ca. 1100*

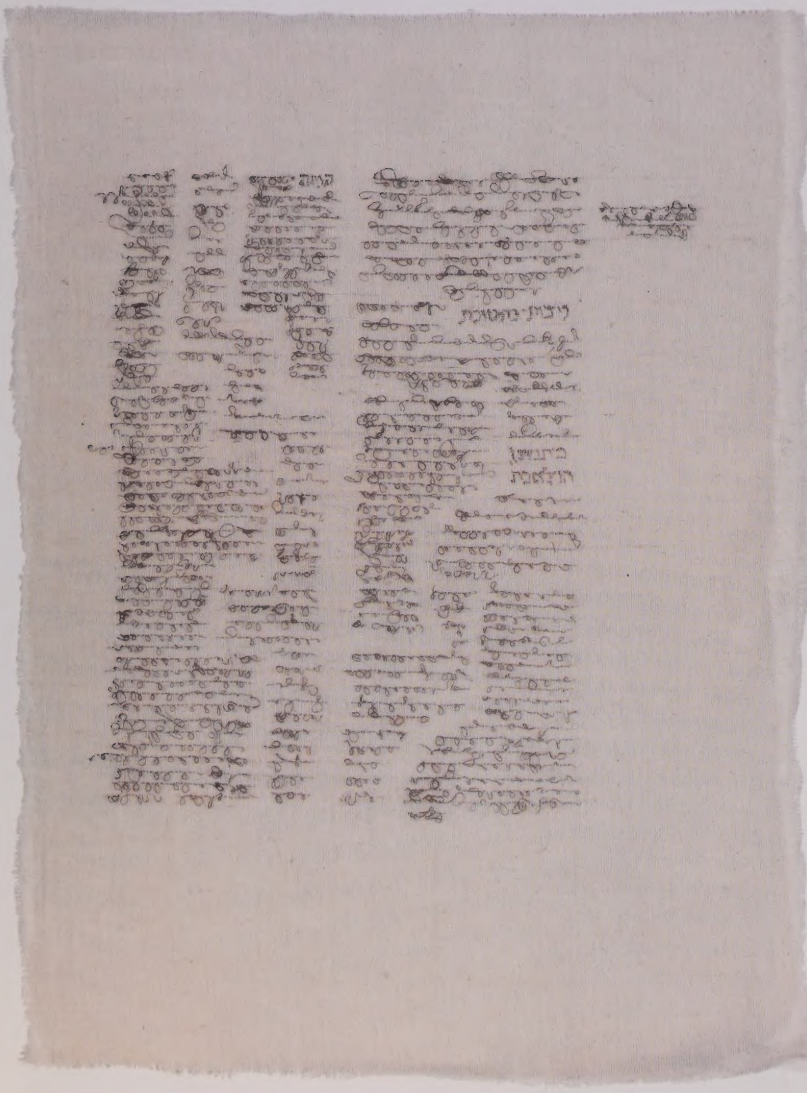
**Artist's Remarks**

*Commentary* reflects my explorations of the ambiguities inherent in the comprehension of language. I am interested in investigating the multiple meanings that texts generate. What is of particular interest to me is the relationship between the author's intention and the reader's interpretation.

This focus began about ten years ago when I was pursuing graduate studies in Chicago. I had made a decision to create a new body of work. I haunted flea markets and second hand stores in search of things of interest to me: old postcards, letters, journals, ledgers. Back in my studio, I attached these finds to my studio wall by leaning them on a series of nails. I began connecting the nails with wire to keep the objects from falling. Before long, I had created a network of objects covered with strands of wire, a web that kept growing with my new acquisitions and became my visual sketchbook. I was struck by the incredibly personal nature of these items and the fact that all of the objects on the wall referred to some form of written communication. In response, I explored the use of many materials such as plied copper wire and metallic filaments suspended on the wall with steel pins. These installations were evocative of a variety of forms: musical scores, graphs that record vocal chord vibrations, and even the semblance of language. I also explored enlarging and reducing texts to the point of illegibility. I realized that I had begun to find my visual vocabulary. I then began to experiment with gauzy fabric. Word-like shapes began to appear as I applied pigment to snags that I pulled from the fabric. A language that I couldn't read began to emerge from the cloth. This discovery led me to further pursue issues such as hidden meanings, privacy, sub-texts and cryptic messages which informed the artworks that followed.

The content of my work has evolved from these earlier works exploring 'the personal' (journals and letters) to the present work, inspired by religious and historical texts including interventions within the books on exhibit in this library. This body of work questions the perception that the meaning carried by written words is fixed and proposes instead that meaning is constantly opened to renewed interpretations.

I approached the library with an exhibition proposal because I believed this venue would provide an atmosphere unlike a traditional gallery. I felt my artworks would resonate within this space which provided much of the source material for my work. The exhibition was a lengthy undertaking. I wish to express my appreciation to the staff at the library for their invaluable assistance throughout this project. My thanks to Linda Joy for the preparation and mounting of the exhibition, to Jim Ingram for the photography and to Stan Bevington for the design of the catalogue. Special thanks to Anne Dondertman for her interest in my proposal, for visiting my studio with Emrys Evans and for making this exhibition a reality.

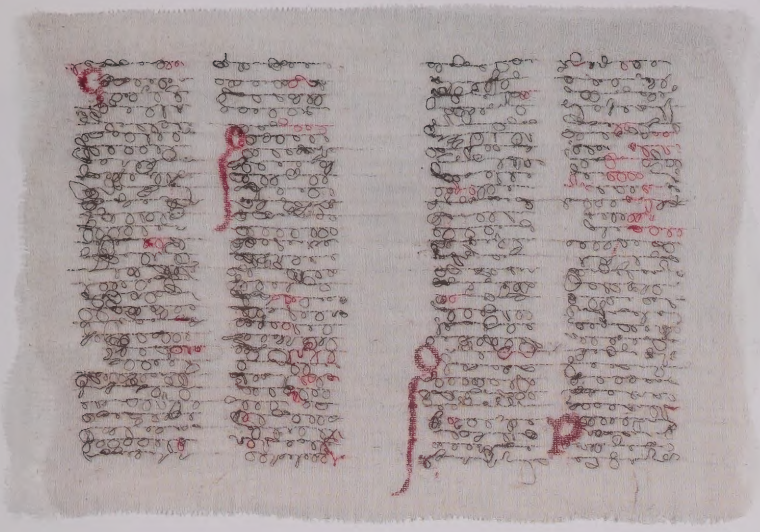


*Commentary: Mordecai ben Hillel. Sefer Mordekhai ha-shalem, 1459*

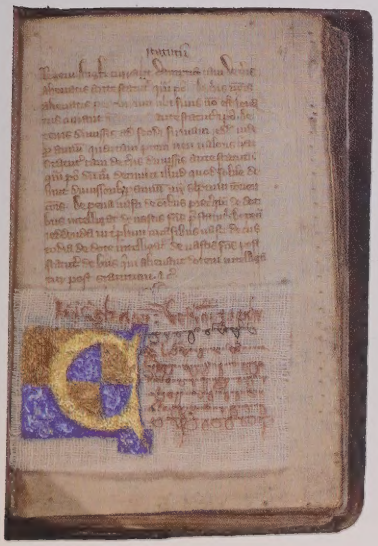
## Artist's Biography

Sylvia Ptak is a Toronto-based artist. She received an M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an A.O.C.A. from the Ontario College of Art and Design and a B.Ed. from McGill University. Selected solo and group exhibitions include *Dissembling Language* at Mercer Union, Toronto (1998), *Sotto Voce* at the Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto (1998), and *ellipsis* which originated at the Koffler Gallery, Toronto (1999) and travelled to Hartnett Gallery, University of Rochester. Her work was featured in solo exhibitions, *manuscriptus*, at articule, Montréal (2001) and *Lacunae* at Gallery Connexion, Fredericton (2002). Most recently, her work was shown in *Beyond Words* at Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax (2003). Ptak's work is included in *Metalogos,* a group exhibition travelling to galleries in La Spezia and Bari, Italy, later this year.

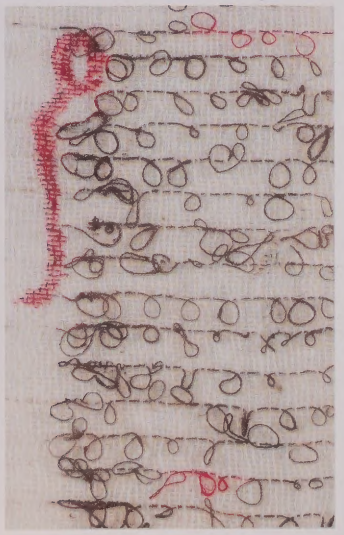
*Commentary: Albertus de Saxonia. Questiones in Aristotelis De Caelo et Mundo, 1407*



*Intervention: Great Britain. Laws, Statutes, etc. Confirmatio Chartorum, ca. 1316-1422*



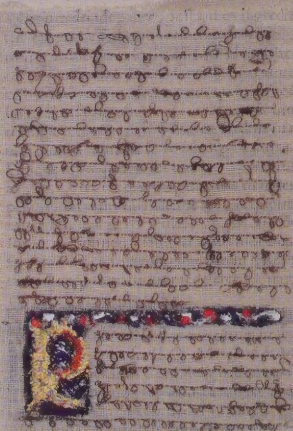
*Commentary: Leaves from a Book of Devotions, fourteenth century*



*Detail from Intervention: Great Britain. Laws, Statutes, etc. Confirmatio Chartorum*

assignanē. Quemadmodum autem. C. Gracchus & Fulvius Flaccus iterfecti sint a nobilitate supra diximus.

Et sane gracchis. Salustius iudiciū suum de morte gracchorum ostendit. Dicit enim eos imoderatū animū habuisse: dum iura ple-bis restituere conantur. Nam licet a principio gracchi egregio animo ducti sint: ut plebis iura & libertatem contra nobilitatem tuerentur: tamen postea ad iniustitiam descenderunt: dū uincere & obtinere conantur quod semel intenderant: quēadmodum Tyberius gracchus fecit q sine exēplo octa



uio Collegæ suo magistratū abrogauit. hoc. n. nimis superbū & intolerabilū usurpē oībus. Cupi ūne uictoriæ id est cupiditate uincendi: videli cet dum cupiunt uincere & obtinere id quod se mel excogitauerant. Sed bono: ordo est. Sed est satius uinci bono. q. more q̄ uincere iniuriam malo more. hæc ē apostolica sententia atq; di/ uina. Dicit. n. quāuis Gracchi imoderatū animū haberent: tamē melius erat ut nobilitas eos uincere permitteret. q̄ ut eos interficeret: & exem plum malū introduceret. Sed bono: sententia generalis quidem est: sed ad propositū accōmo data. Satius: id est melius. Malo more: id est malo exemplo nobilitas uicit iniuriam Grac/ chorum: sed malo exemplo uicit: quia eos iter fecit. & in ipsa uictoria nimiam crudelitatē ex ercuit. Et ideo melius esset uinci q̄ sic uincere. Igitur. ordo est. igitur nobilitas uia est uictoria: ex sua libidine extinxit multos mortales ferro aut fuga. Ea uictoria: qua gracchos uicit & i terfecit. Ex libidine sua. iter uoluntatem & li bidinem hoc iterest secundū Ciceronē in quar to Tusculanarū: Volitas est quæ quid cū rōne desiderat. Quæ aūt rōne aduersa ficitata est: ea libido ē: uel cupiditas effrenata. Ergo desideri/ um i bono uolitas dicē. Desiderū i malo libi do uocaf. Multos mortales ferro aut fuga extinxit: idest multos interfecit: & multos exilio multauit. Plus timoris q̄ potentiæ sibi addi dit. Ex ea uictoria nobilitas fecit: ut plus time ret in posterum non ut plus posset. Quæ res: uideiicet imoderate uti uictoria: ut ipsa crude litatem exercere: sicuti nobilitas fecit. Ma gnas ciuitates pessundedit: id est euertit & dele uit. Sic Athenæ florētissima ciuitas euersa est.

Maturus: id est citius: Si uellem loqui de pti bus ciuitatis: prout res postulat. tam magna res est ut citius tēpus defuturum sit q̄ res. Redeo id est reuertor. Facta digressione. posteq̄ defecti plit mores & partes ciuitatis: nunc reuertitur ad id quod omiserat ut ostendat quid factum sit. postquā Ro/ mani sui sunt augurtha. & postquam Aulus uictus fœdus cum iugurtha fecit. Quanquam aduersus: id ē contrarius & inimicus: licet aduersus esset plebi propter factionem: tamen famam integram & incorruptā habebat. Fama tamen æquabilis: quia nihil de seipso prauum & iniquum dicebatur. Magistratum ingres sus est: id est ubi magistratum iniit. Consules & alii magistratus aliquot mensibus ante declarabantur. Deinde calendis ianuarius magistratum inibant: id est magistratum Romanæ Reipublicæ administrare in cipiebant. Et quanquam aduerso populi partibus: fama tamen æquabili inuiolata & incorrupta erat. Or do est pendens a superiori. Numidia euenerat metello acri uiro: & tamen erat fama æquabili & inuiola ta: scilicet ipse metellus: quanquam erat contrarius & aduersus populis partibus. Quanquam metellus erat inimicus partium ipsius populi: tamē erat æquabili fama. quia metellus æqualiter & similiter probatus erat apud populum: sicuti apud Senatum. quamuis esset inimicus populi propter partes. Et sine dubio magna q dem laus est metelli: quia eius & mores ita probabantur ab inimicis sicuti ab amicis. Aduersus partium populi: id est inimicus partium populi. Alia omnia cōmunia sibi cum collega ratus: id est cum putasset alia omnia præter bellum tam ad collegam q̄ ad se pertinere. Metellus enim putabat alia omnia esse cō munia sibi cum collega: hoc est alia omnia præter bellum tam ad collegam q̄ ad se pertinere: sed bellum pu tabat præcipue ad se pertinere: quia illa prouincia sibi per sortem euenerat. in qua illud bellum gerēdū erat. Et ō metellus curā rei; aliarū ostium ad rēpu. spectantiū: Collegæ suo reliquēs: ad bellū pcipue animū intēdit.

præsidia

Præsidia undiq; accersere: pro accersebat. Auxilia undiq; a sociis petebat. Ad hæc ideſt præterea. Patranda ideſt perficienda. Auctoritate ſenatus: quia ſenatus decreuerat aut latini ad hoc bellum auxilia mittere rent. Et reges: qui erant ſocii populi romani: ſicuti fuit: Eumenes: Ariobarzanes rex & multi alii. Vultro inſuper. Aduerſus diuitias inuictum animum regebat. Ciues bene de Metello ſperabant ob hanc cauſam potiſſimum: qa fciebant illum pecuniis a iugurtha corrumpi non poſſe quemadmodũ ſuperiores duces & legati corrupti fuerant. Nã metellus a diuitiis uinci non poterat. Exercitus inersuitia deſcribit exercitus corrupti. A Suprio Albino proconſule: Albinus elapſo anno non conſul ſed proconſul erat. Conſulis autem & proconſulis idem erat imperium. Nam uterq; duodecim faſces. i. duodecim lictores habebat. Lingua q̃ manu promptior: magis promptus erat ad dicendum q̃ ad faciendum. Prædator: exercitus romãus prædas ex ſociis agebat: & ipſe erat præda hoſtium. Sine imperio & modeſtia habitus: ideſt rectus ſine auctoritate & modeſtia: & hoc pertinet ad Aulum fratrem Albini conſulis. Ita ideſt hoc modo qua exercitus tanta in ſe uitia habebat. Imperatori nouo. i. Metello: ordo eſt ita plus ſollicitudinis accedebat nouo imperatori ex malis moribus: q̃ auxilii aut bone ſpei ex copia militum. Nouus imperator magis timebat propter malos mores & pp̃ui/tia exercitus q̃ ſperabat ꝓpter multitudinem.

Statuit tamen Metellus. Q uamuis (inquit) tempus æſtatis inſtaret bello opportunum: & ciues euentum belli expectarent: tamen Metellus bellum inchoare noluit priuſq; exercitum licentia & laſciuia corruptum: ad normam ueteris diſciplinæ reuocaſſet. Statuit tamen: ordo eſt: tamen Metellus ſtatuit non prius attingere bellum q̃ coegiſſet milites laborare diſciplina maiorum: q̃q̃ & tempus æſtiuorum iminuerat mora comitiorum: & q̃q̃ putabat animos ciuium intentos expectatione euentus. Comitiorum mora: ideſt ꝓpter moꝝ comitiorum: declarat quare tempus æſtatis iminebat: & adhuc nihil fecerat: hæc fuit cauſa: quia magiſtratus ſuo tẽpore creari non poterant: quia comitia impediebantur propter ſeditionem Tribunorum Publi Luculi & Lucii Anni: qui continuare magiſtratum uolebant: ſicuti ſupra dixit. Et ob hanc cauſam Metellus tardius conſul creatus in prouincia in uenerat æſtate iam inſtante. Expectatione euentus: quia cues itemq̃ expectabant euentum belli. Priuſq; milites maioꝝ diſciplina laborare coegiſſet. i. bellum i

ſcribere: præſidia undique accerſere: arma: tela equos: & cætera inſtrumenta militiæ parare. ad hoc commeatum affatim denique omnia: quæ in bello uario & multarum rerum egenti uſui eſſe ſolent: cæterum ad ea patranda ſenatus auctoritate ſocii nomenq; latinum: & reges ultro auxilia mittere. Poſtremo omnis ciuitas ſummo ſtudio nitebatur. Itaq; ex ſententia omnibus rebus paratis compoſitiſq; in numidiam proficiſcitur magna ſpe ciuium: tũ propter artis bona: tum maxime q̃ aduerſum diuitias inuictum animum gerebat: & auaritia magiſtratuum ante id tempus in Numidia noſtræ opes contuſæ hoſtium q̃ auctæ erant. Sed ubi in Affricam uenit exercitus ei traditur a. Sp. Albino ꝓconſule ineris. imbecillis: neque periculi neque laboris patiens: lingua quã manu promptior: prædator ex ſociis: & ipſe præda hoſtium: ſine imperio & modeſtia habitus, ita imperatori nouo plus e malis moribus ſollicitudinis q̃ ex copia militum auxilii aut bonæ ſpei accedebat. Statuit Metellus tamen q̃q̃ & æſtiuorum tempus comitiorum mora iminebat: & expectatione euentus ciuium animos intentos putabat: non prius bellum attingere q̃ maiorum diſciplina milites laborare coegiſſet. Nam Albinus Auli fratris: exercituſq; clade perculſus poſtq̃ decreuerat non egredi prouincia quantum temporis æſtiuorum: in imperiũ fuit plærumq; milites ſtatutis caſtris habebat:

choare noluit priuſq̃ milites inſtruxiſſet ſecundum diſciplinam maiorum. Nam laſciuia & licentia corrupti conſuetudinem diſciplinæ militaris uitio imperatorum amiſerant: ſicuti ipſe Sal. declarat. Nam albinus. Non ſolum auius albini frater: ſed etiam albinus ipſe exercitum licenter habuit: & laſciuia corrumpi & eneruari pmiſit: ordo eſt. Nã albinus ꝓculſus clade Auli fratris & exercitus: habebat milites in caſtris ſtatiuis plærumq; ineſſi cũ egeſtas ador aut pabuli ſubegerat mutare loca: ſ̃tum tpis æſtiuoꝝ fuit in impio: poſtq̃ decreuerat nõ egredi a prouincia. A prouincia. ſ. ex ea pte aſſricæ quã tenebant romani. Quantum tpis æſtiuoꝝ ideſt toto tempore æſtatis quo fuit in imperio: uidelicet proconſul. Habebat. i. tenebat. Albinus: cũ in prouinciam uenifſet exercitũ laſciuia corruptum inuenit: & ideo bellum cõtra iugurtham temptare noluit: ſed in prouincia exercitum tenuit in caſtris toto tpe æſtatis quo fuit in imperio: nec milites ex caſtris egredi pmittebat niſi neceſſitas cogeret. Sed tamen milites ſub norma militaris diſciplinæ nõ temebat. nã neq; ingi lias faciebãt more militari: & licenter lixæ militibus ꝓmixti die noctuq; uagabantur: agros uaſtabãt: prædas cũ mercatoribus permutabãt. frumentũ publice datum uendebãt: & ex militibus mercatores quodãmodo efficiebãtur: q̃ uitia metellus anteq̃ bellum attingeret primo quoq; tpe ſumma diligentia corrigere curauit.

*Intervention: Sallust. Works, 1495*

3 D. Pontaj 23 Jan. Westmonasterij.

Dicunt amicique veteres Epicurei isti naturalistæ cometas fortè quod naturales sint multo pro tendere, de veris corum rerum positarum, diversis locis aspectus. Solis Lunæ, stellarum naturaliter fatis temporibus fieri, et longinqua experientia, non de eorum effectu certiores facere, vel illos ex Synagogis talem aëris in diversa motum et aspectum mutuum progredientium, qui procul a se, cadaverum, qui propiores sibi, quidnam eorum creata vero apparentes et postea evanescentes ob quas portendant vel monuit cum Machiavello genios esse permanentes humanum genus, et fortunam calamitatem primitivæ et virtutem vicissitudines respicere.

Tandem ante Halonei, Parhelii, Paraselenæ, temperatæ et mediocres minuant, qui circulari forma apparent, quorum vero tenebricosa flamma ignem refert, ex elementi istius fumo conflari. Cometæ vi Elementij. Ego sulphureæ ejus partes primo quasi in fortem collectæ, demum per compagines hanc dispersæ aëris insolant, deinde, tenuitatem et levitatem nacti, ad ignis humores, unde orti, et bella.

4 Doctoris Gargravii 23 Jan. Westmonasterij.

Petrus illud effectum: multum comitatus apparuisse, quin malum alicujus vel bonum etiam portendere pro vate habendum esse censes? Plutarchus et Strabo Virgil Lapis Pomponius de Medicis, loco Emblematis utebatur pro Symbolo. Cæsar Secundum Lampridium in Symbolis heroicis pag. Josephus et Hegesippus memorant ante Lanceleam Hierosolymitanam apparuisse Typium fu rentem gladium super Templum vel et justissima vindicta divinæ præmunitum nec minoribus jam peccatis obnoxii simus, quam centum olim illa Numinis divini ignes fundaica. Omnia quæ ab illud in diuturnæ vederemus si quis gothico oculo nil precipue pro rebus veram faciem ut insinuat rerum mutationes ex eventibus sine ejus novus hic Prophetæ excitetur missi inspector, e labentem in ejecti populum ad sanum mentem revocare.

D. Sollerij Mathematici 24 Jan.

Quæsita hic apparuit in medio Stellarum, quæ secundum Cardanum de natura Martis fuer Ergo Belle et Sagittarius portendit. Domus illa Cælestis, ubi primum observatus erat, finit occ ubi decori significatorem martis imminentes fuisse veneres et postea mitis in loco Jupiteris Videtur quoque ex particularibus Prognosticis collatis indicare mortem duorum Potentissi rum Regum, unius in Europa alterius in Oriente.

D. Thomæ Street insignis Mathematici.

Cometa fuit semithalis per Africam ad zonam Æquinoctialem, deinde zonam Cancri ingressus ibi b ta haud legionis in conjunctum cum Anglis et Batavis nec similem, donec plane horum ne ipsis terris nuncuparetur. Inundationes et horrenda naufragia audiemus ab Occidente et prout ad o superior illa conjunctio magnet tali in respectu cum cometa vehementer cooperabitur.

Observationibus per Telescopium Dnij.

Telescopium illud mediocribus accuratissimum est et eo pedum longitudinem æquat, viri tutes cometa nubeculæ et interdum crinitis argenteis, cum particulis porrectis flammeis, et stria interinsertis vibrantibus, ut vel ex eo posses sulphureas flammas observare in modum spiritus cum conflictibus obtusa corpus cometæ hirsutis lucis effulgentes, regi illa rotunda, sed inæquatus fore figuram saturni, ferrabant vero nonnulli se vidisse partes sulphureas et bituminosas ex Sole, spumi. Ipse vero minime quicquam tale unquam observare potui.

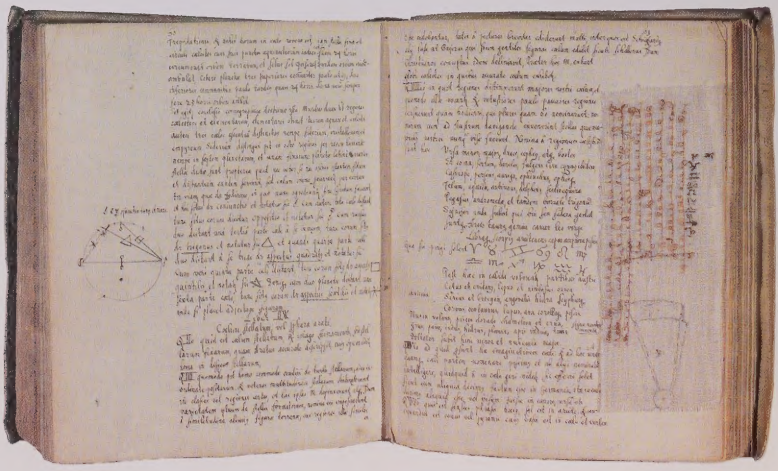
Capellanus Morgan.

Dejecit Argumentum haud leve inde posse inferri de motu Telluris copernici, si ma nata densitas ex subtilione, corruptis materiæ, adeoque non transcenderet Sphæram Lunæ, mi omnino tamen in medium celiquorum luminarium cum primo mobili 24 horarum interv circumferretur. Ergo cum terra moveatur. Addidit etiam, cometas ut plurimum observatos in Zona Torrida ob vehementem attractionem Solis exobitus cursu in temperatas partes fer et sic evanescere.

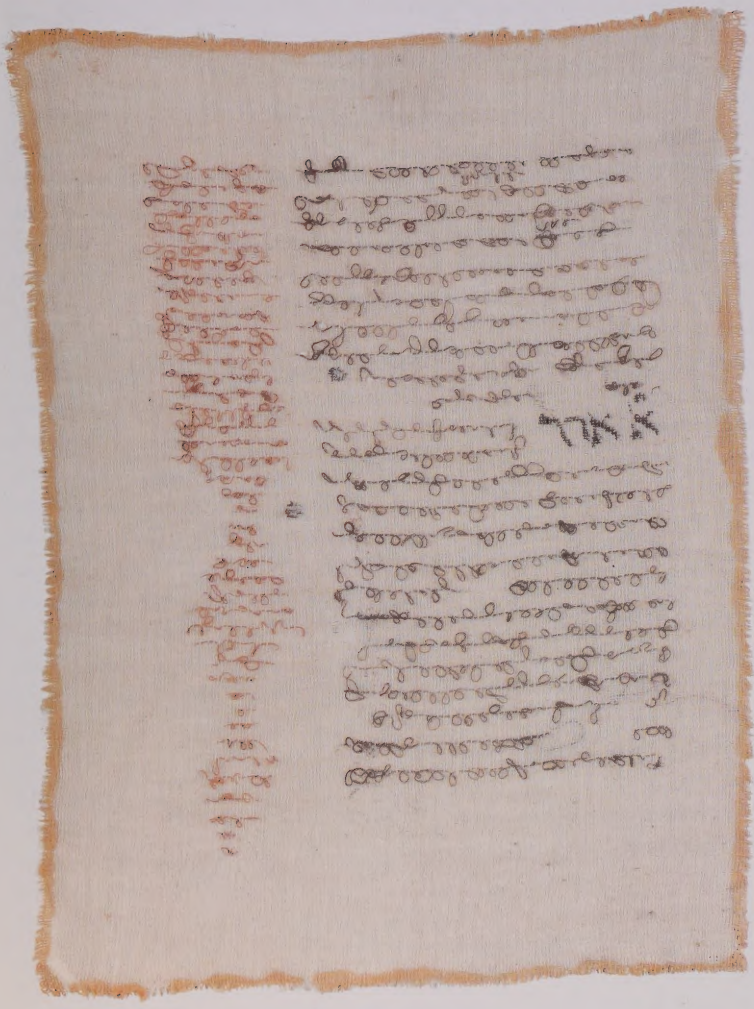
Finitum.

*Intervention: Observationes ... de cometa, ca. 1666*

*Intervention: Athansius Theodorus. Commentarius in Universam Aristotelis Physicam, 1652*



*Intervention: Teofilo Folengo. Opus Merlini Cocaii ... Macaronicorum, 1692*



*Commentary: Siddur, twelfth century*

**List of works**

Works in cases 1-8 in the upper level are comprised of gauze pages and fibre interventions within texts from the library's collection. Media consists of cotton gauze and pigment. Dimensions are indicated in centimeters, height preceding width following date of completed work. Titles marked with an asterisk are not from the Fisher collection.

CASE ONE

*Commentary: Babylonian Talmud, sixth century**
1999, 31 × 23 cm.
*Commentary: Siddur, twelfth century*
2003, 19 × 14 cm.
*Intervention: Peter Bernard. Commonplace book, 1794-1805*
2003, 12 × 10 cm.
*Intervention: Augustine. De Civitate Dei, Book 1-13, fifteenth century*
2004, 10.5 × 5 cm.
*Intervention: Sallust. Works, 1495*
2003, 15 × 10.5 cm.

CASE TWO

*Intervention: Miscellanea Eruditionis, 1675-1692*
2003, 13 × 17 cm.
*Commentary: Deed Granting Privileges to the Charterhouse of Val de Cristo, 1408*
2000, 33 × 47.5 cm.
*Intervention: Thomas Aquinas. Scripta ad Hanibaldum Episcopum, 1492*
2004, 6 × 10 cm.
*Intervention: Legal Cases and Opinions, ca. 1610*
2004, 11 × 5.5 cm.
*Intervention: Donato Antonio Leonardi. Miscellanea Eruditionis, 1675-1692*
2003, 13 × 18 cm.

CASE THREE

*Commentary: Bible. The Four Gospels in Greek [Codex Torontonensis], ca. 1100*
2003, 16 × 13 cm.
*Commentary: Peter Lombard. Sententiarum Libri IV, late thirteenth century*
2003, 15 × 10 cm.
*Commentary: Leaves from a Book of Devotions, fourteenth century*
2003, 15 × 20.5 cm.
*Intervention: Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologicae: Pars Secunda: Prima Pars, 1478*
2004. 9 × 9 cm.
*Intervention: Capitoli Givrati, 1644 from Carte varie M.S.*
2004, 10 × 13 cm.
*Intervention: Moses ben Jacob of Coucy. Sefer Mits-vot gadol, fourteenth century*
2004, 7.5 × 7 cm.

CASE FOUR

*Commentary: Mordecai ben Hillel. Sefer Mordekhai ha-shalem, 1459*
2003, 31 × 22 cm.
*Commentary: Certificate of Married Woman's Deed, nineteenth century**
2001, 30 × 43 cm.
*Intervention: Robert Ferguson. Philosophia Universalis, 1672*
2004, 6 × 8.5 cm.
*Intervention: Catholic Church. Franciscan Breviary, btwn. 1455 and 1482*
2004, 10.5 × 5.5 cm.
*Intervention: Fragment of a Breviary, before 1350*
2002, 8 × 10.5 cm.
*Intervention: Great Britain. Laws, Statutes, etc. Confirmatio Chartorum, ca. 1316-1422*
2004, 5 × 5.5 cm.

CASE FIVE

*Commentary: Normandy, Laws, Statutes, etc. Le Coutumier de Normandie, last part of the fourteenth century*
2003, 15.5 × 10 cm.
*Commentary: Codex Sinaiticus, fourth century**
2000, 29.5 × 29 cm.
*Intervention: Sefer ha-Zohar, early fifteenth century*
2004, 5 × 16 cm.
*Intervention: Observationes ... de cometa, ca. 1666*
2004, 6.5 × 18.5 cm.
*Intervention: Athansius Theodorus. Commentarius in Universam Aristotelis Physicam, 1652*
2004, 15 × 5.5 cm.

CASE SIX

*Commentary: John L. Mackenzie. Manuscript record of cases, 1857*
2003, 18 × 12 cm.
*Commentary: Leaves from a Book of Devotions, fifteenth century*
2002, 18 × 13 cm.
*Commentary: Colloquy, Cotton Tiberius A, eleventh century**
2001, 29 × 22.5 cm.
*Intervention: Pietro de Crescenzi. Ruralia Commoda, ca. 1490-95*
2004, 6.5 × 8.5 cm.
*Intervention: Dante Alighieri. La Commedia, 1491*
2004, 7 × 8 cm.

CASE SEVEN

*Commentary: Miscellanea Eruditionis, 1675-1692*
2003, 20 × 13.5 cm.
*Commentary: Peter Lombard. Sententiarum Libri IV, late thirteenth century*
2003, 27 × 20 cm.
*Commentary: C. Julius Solinus. Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium, ca. 1100*

2003, 19 × 13 cm.
*Intervention: Varia : se Trata de Asuntos Politicos y Religiosos de Espana, 1617-1726*
2004, 9 × 6 cm.
*Intervention: Giovanni Battista Ricciardi. Trespolo Tutore, ca. 1680*
2004, 4.5 × 13 cm.
*Intervention: Teofilo Folengo. Opus Merlini Cocaii ... Macaronicorum, 1692*
2004, 4.5 × 7 cm.

CASE EIGHT
*Commentary: Sallust, Works, 1495*
2000, 20.5 × 15.5 cm.
*Commentary: Albertus de Saxonia. Questiones in Aristotelis De Caelo et Mundo, 1407*
2004, text dimensions, 20 × 21 cm.

Maclean Hunter Room, Lower level
*Commentary: Fragment from Vergil, thirteenth century*
2003, text dimensions, 19.5 × 13 cm.

*Untitled*, Installation.
found optical lenses, steel pins. text fragments (colour copies of manuscripts, mathematics, music and post cards), collection of the artist
2004, variable dimensions

Three Journals
*Homage to Pablo Neruda, Ode to Things.*
*Homage to Mary Oliver, The Journey*
*Homage to Mary Oliver, Rage*
2003, each journal, 12 × 14 cm.

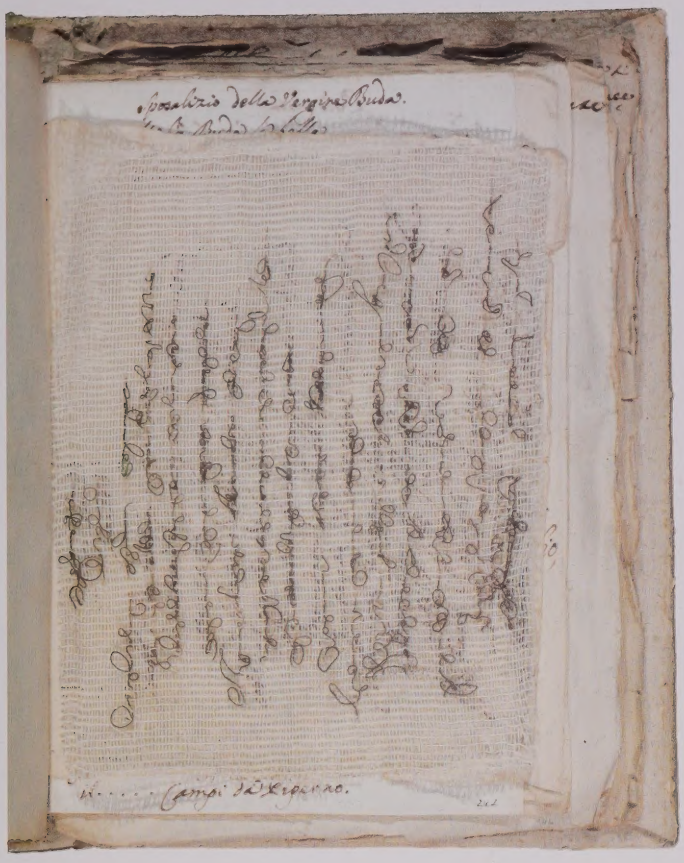
*Silver notebook*
2003, 8 × 9 cm.

*Cypher*
pigment, vellum, wood, steel pins
1995, 6 × 8.5 cm.

*Writing Exercises*
school-book, gauze, pigment
2002, 23.5 × 56 cm.

*The Parts of a Letter*
school-book, gauze, pigment
2002, 18.5 × 25 cm.

Artist's collections, working materials and research



*Intervention: Miscellanea Eruditionis, 1675-1692*

ISBN 0-7717-6049-7

© University of Toronto Library, Kyo Maclear and Sylvia Ptak

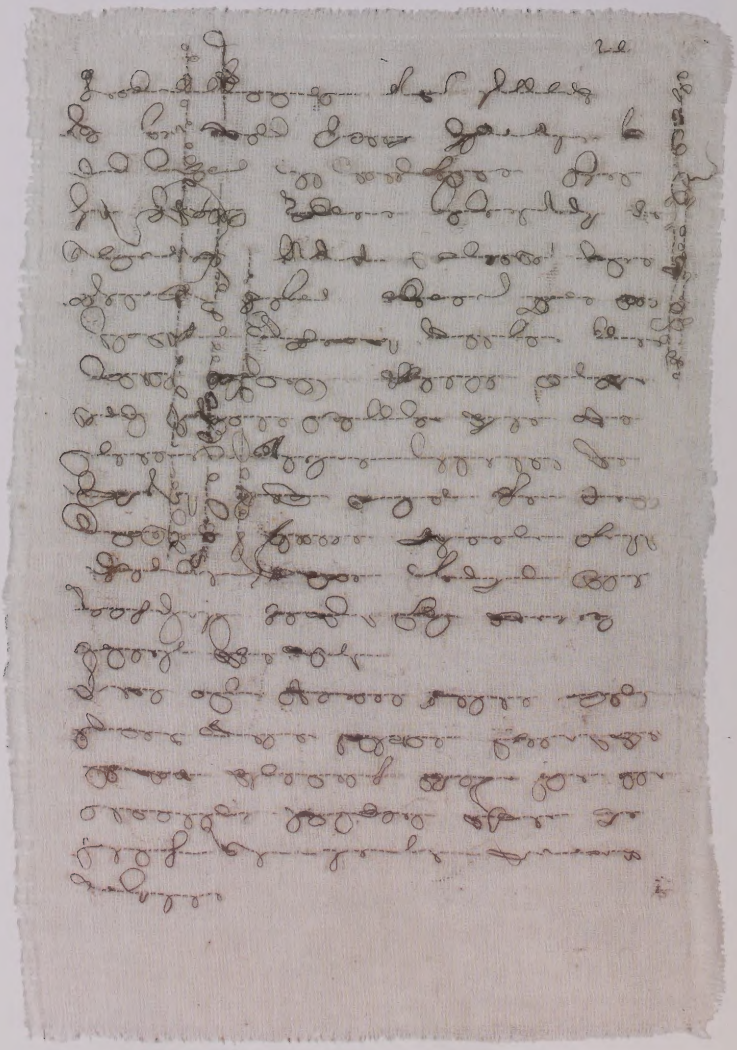
Exhibition installed by Linda Joy and John Toyonaga

Digital photography for catalogue by Jim Ingram

Catalogue design by Stan Bevington

Printed at the Coach House Press on bpNichol Lane, Toronto

The artist gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Arts Council.



*Commentary: John L. Mackenzie. Manuscript record of cases, 1857*